



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX**

**75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105**

Ref: 8MO

July 6, 2005

Mr. Michael L. Balboni, District Ranger
Three Rivers Ranger District
1437 N. Highway 2
Troy, Montana 59935

Re: CEQ 20050257; Northeast Yaak
Final EIS & ROD

Dear Mr. Balboni:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region VIII Montana Office has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Northeast Yaak Project.

Thank you for providing responses to EPA's DEIS comments. We support Northeast Yaak Project objectives to improve conditions in old growth habitat and grizzly bear habitat, and reduce impacts of roads on streams and fisheries. We are particularly supportive of proposed activities that will reduce impacts of roads on water quality and fisheries, since roads are the single largest source of management related sediment in most watersheds, and reduction in road impacts will enhance habitat for native westslope cutthroat trout and interior redband trout.

We are pleased that substantial watershed restoration work in the project area has already occurred and that it is expected that funding will be available to initiate the proposed NE Yaak Project restoration work beginning in 2007 or 2008. We are also pleased that the proposed temporary road in the Porcupine Creek watershed has been eliminated, and that additional road decommissioning (with guaranteed funding) in the Blacktail Creek drainage has been included in the preferred alternative. We also appreciate additional review being given to harvest units in the Koo Koo and Porcupine Creek drainages posing erosion risks, and the commitment to do further reconnaissance to identify watershed restoration opportunities in these watersheds, and to coordinate proposed activities in 303(d) listed watersheds with Montana DEQ and EPA TMDL staff.

While we have concerns about the proposed reopening of Vinal Lake Road #746 in regard to increased risks to wildlife habitat, security and connectivity, increased risk of spread of weeds, and other adverse impacts that may be associated with opening this road to motorized travel, we recognize the need to provide public access, and to balance environmental and



resource management trade-offs.

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment during the EIS process, including the opportunity to review the proposed project in the field. If you have any questions please contact Mr. Steve Potts of my staff in Helena at 406-457-5022 or in Missoula at 406-329-3313 or via e-mail at potts.stephen@epa.gov . Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/S/

John F. Wardell
Director
Montana Office

cc: Larry Svoboda/Julia Johnson, EPA 8EPR-N, Denver

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH FORM

ERP NUMBER _____

RATING ASSIGNED TO PROJECT

EC-2 _____

**NAME OF EPA OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE
FOR REVIEW OF PROJECT (Principle Reviewer)**

Steve Potts _____

SUMMARY OF COMMENT LETTER

_____ The EPA has reviewed the Northeast Yaak Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) prepared by the Kootenai National Forest. The EPA supports project objectives to improve conditions in old growth habitat and grizzly bear habitat, and reduce impacts of roads on streams and fisheries, noting the importance of procuring adequate funding to allow timely implementation of road restoration work. EPA is concerned about the proposed opening of Vinal Lake Road #746 to motorized travel due to reduction of wildlife habitat, security and connectivity.

PARAGRAPH APPROVED FOR PUBLICATION

**(Initials of
OFA Approving Official)**

NOTE: Transmit 2 copies to MIU

8MO File: 0413